

THE
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After this cold considerance, sentence me :
And as you are a King, speak in your state
What I have done that misbecame my place.

SHAKESPEARE.

MANY of the writers, who have given their labours to the world in periodical publications, have complained heavily of the dangers, to which Authorship has exposed them, and have warned posterity to be cautious, how they quit ease for fame. Much, however, of this lamentation may safely be imputed to vanity rather than to real distress, and to a desire of magnifying merit by an enumeration of its difficulties. For with what justice can he complain of being held up to public view, who may conceal his name from all mankind, and who, notwithstanding the celebrity of his character, need not be personally known to any but his Printer's boy and the proprietor of his garret ? who

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may walk along the streets of *London* undistinguished amidst the crowd, and who may visit the *Tavern* or the *Play* unmolested by salutation, unknown and disregarded ?

VERY different is the situation of him, who ventures to write in the Country, where concealment is less practicable and discovery much more dangerous. In a small town, every minute event forms a kind of æra among its inhabitants : the news of the day, which every where constitutes a great part of the conversation, is there necessarily confined to a very few topics : and instances of authorship are in most towns so rare, that if any thing is issued from the Press, however little its importance, whether it be an epigram, a song, or even a hand-bill, all are eager to learn from whom it proceeded. If the enquirer does not meet with an immediate answer, conjecture supplies the place of authentic information ; and partly from concurring circumstances, partly from the testimony of his own silence, the offender is readily convicted. It is, therefore, scarcely possible, that an author should lie concealed in the Country ; and more especially, if he keep curiosity awake by constantly renewing the cause of enquiry, as is the case with Periodical writers : and yet how desirable is concealment the *Country Spectator* has already been taught by experience.

Two' satire or personal invective was never my

aim, but rather has been studiously avoided, I have sometimes been suspected of indulging petty animosity against those, to whom I bear neither love nor hatred ; and I have scarcely ever attempted to delineate a character or to censure any species of folly, but I have heard privately before *Tuesday Evening*, to what great personage in my neighbourhood I was thought to have alluded, and what lady had done me the honour to “ wonder at my assurance.” It may appear surprising ; yet so strong is the principle of self-love, that some people are as tenacious of their disgrace as they are of their reputation ; they eagerly believe, that if a foible, which has unfortunately been ridiculed, in any measure belong to themselves, they must be the persons, to whom the reproof was solely directed, because follies are so extremely peculiar, and are so very difficult to be found ! To these *monopolizers* I beg leave to point out their mistake ; and to assure them, that however willing I may be to give them their due portion of weakness, absurdity or vice, I cannot allow them an exclusive right to their possessions, because, wherever I have been, I have met with those, who claim *their* share also in the property, and are equally capable of supplying their *quota* to my work. And, indeed, to avoid the appearance of drawing too often upon my neighbours, I frequently levy contributions upon strangers, or bring into use such remarks, as I have made in my various peregrinations at home and abroad : I say *abroad*, since a very

short tour on the Continent forms the *modern Traveller*, and besides, I find that many of my predecessors discourse very fluently about *Brussels* and *Paris*.

BEING, however, somewhat callous to unmerited rebuke, I can easily bear the wrath of those, who only persuade themselves that they are offended, or who, if they really are angry, certainly deserve pity. But I cannot help expressing my deep concern at discovering any cause, which may tend to obstruct the success of my labours ; and I heartily lament, when I perceive that these my most sublime and profound lucubrations lose much of their effect by the single circumstance of their author's being known. It is very truly said, “ that no man “ is a prophet in his own country.” He, who is heard every day to trifle in conversation and betrays levity over a bottle, will not be supposed to be very wise in his study, however grave his remonstrances and however just his remarks : and every thing he does in his public character is so closely connected with his private conduct, that unless he lays himself under the most unnatural restraint and is always on his guard, his credit will inevitably suffer, and he will not be thought “ a prophet.”

I HAVE often amused myself with imagining what importance my lectures would assume, were I resident in *London*. There, probably, I should be the

tenant of a lofty habitation, and I should neither know my Readers, nor be known by them. From this my aerial abode, I should rarely sally forth before dusk, when I might be tempted to half a play or an evening's entertainment at some place of public resort. Like the ancient monarchs of *Perſia*, I should issue edicts, which my subjects would receive with becoming reverence, because they would know nothing of the foibles of a Legislator, who had never been seen in public; and, therefore, they would naturally conclude, that he, who was so wonderfully ingenious in his writings, must be equally surprising before his own fire-side. It would, then, be impossible for them to discover, that the man, who had dared to offer them instruction, was insignificant in his appearance, dull in company, or placed in a humble station: they would, perhaps, form opinions of him directly contrary to reality; they might suppose him to be a man of a commanding aspect, a prodigious wit, and as to rank, at least an Esquire.

I HAVE been led into these reflections, chiefly, by the receipt of some letters sent from distant parts and intended for the *Country Spectator*, yet addressed to me by name. To one, who is so fully sensible of the danger of open authorship, such an event must be truly alarming; and were I not a man of considerable courage, it would be sufficient to deter me from the prosecution of my design. I have met,

however, with so much encouragement, that I shall not easily be induced to desist : at the same time, I must beseech my Readers for many and important reasons, to know no more of me than they can help. To lie concealed in my own neighbourhood I always foresaw would be impossible ; but to be known by name at a distance from home is more than I expected or wished. I, therefore, entreat all those, who are yet ignorant of my name, profession, person and abode, to make no enquiry respecting either : and as to the few, who are already acquainted with these several particulars, I can only desire them to forget what they have learnt, and to judge what I am solely by my Papers. In this demand there is, surely, nothing unreasonable; since all great men on certain occasions are allowed to be *incog.* and however well they are known, are noticed by none of their friends.

BUT this petition is more especially addressed to my worthy friends my Correspondents, many of whom have doubtless been offended at my neglect of their contributions. Of some of them I should be extremely sorry to incur the displeasure, and to these I wish by all means to be unknown, otherwise than in my public capacity of the *Country Spectator.* If my request comes too late, I would have them consider me as a sort of Jury-man of the Muses, who has sworn to decide the fate of the compositions laid before him, without fear, favor or affection ; and

as such, I beg them not to resent any verdict, which I shall have given against them, after I have quitted the Court.

THIS request, however, is made to those of my Correspondents, who may have some reason to imagine themselves injuriously treated or undeservedly neglected: for to many of them, and indeed, to the majority, I do not conceive explanation to be necessary or apology to be due. One gentleman sends me a weighty budget of communications, and is very wrathful against me for having so far erred in my criticism, as to have given the preference to that Paper, which, it seems, was in his own infallible opinion, only the second, perhaps the third, in respect of literary merit: tho' I had not presumed to say a syllable of its pre-eminence in point of composition, but had made choice of it above the rest, as being the most suitable to the plan of my work: with which, however, the gentleman will not allow me to be so well acquainted as himself. Another writer favors me with learned disquisitions on *Botany, Chemistry, Medicine and Metaphysics*; why these are rejected, I hope he will be able to discover without my assistance. A third class of my Correspondents are those, who were never taught to *spell*; a set, no doubt, of very worthy gentlemen, whom I am sorry to condemn in the gross, but I had secretly resolved at the very outset of my undertaking to pay no regard to any of their communications. The

last and not the least incorrigible of my Correspondents are they, who are not content to puzzle me with their prose, but absolutely insult me in verse. One of these poets I had determined to make a public example by printing his verses with his signature at the end of them. My clemency, however, has prevailed over my justice; for how far he was deserving of punishment will easily be seen, when I assure my Readers, that his lines consist, some of fifteen, some of sixteen syllables, and have at the close of them, by way of rhimes, *opinion* and *politician*, *provoked* and *enveloped*, and other combinations equally harmonious.

I CANNOT conclude without observing, that almost all, who have obliged me with offers of assistance, are cautious how they encounter much labour and fatigue. While they supply me with Essays, which are alike adapted to all publications of this kind, they leave to me the whole trouble of exploring the latent sources of originality, which I am endeavouring to discover in the region of rural life. I wish, therefore, to apprise some of those, whose Papers may never come to light, that elegance or strength of language employed on hackneyed subjects, cannot be secure of insertion: and that the extraneous Essays, with which this work will be interspersed, are always to be procured without difficulty or delay.

R.